THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# THE WORSHIP OF ELAGABALUS AT ROME

by

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# INVENTORIES DE CIGARETTES

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APPLIQUES AU CAS SPECIAL DE CIGARETTE SOLDIER

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and that they recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance the thesis entitled The Worship of Elagabalus at Rome, that has been submitted by Derek Allan Tumber in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

# A B S T R A C T

In this thesis an account of the worship of Elagabalus has been given; as far as possible this is a simple account that does not attempt to consider similar cults in great detail but examines only those sources with particular reference to the cult of Elagabalus. This shows the presence of a native Italian sun-god, the worship of Apollo, Mithraism and several Syrian cults, but it has been made clear that, although there was an oriental element in Rome and in the army, and obvious shortcomings in the traditional Roman religion, Juppiter was still the chief god of the Romans. An examination of the literary sources, coins and inscriptions relating to the worship of Elagabalus clearly indicates that the emperor-priest was determined to make the Baal of Emera the chief deity of the Roman Empire. The worship of Elagabalus at Rome, as it is presented in the sources, appears typically Semitic although a thorough comparison between this cult and Semitic religion in general was not possible. Finally, an account of the emperor's overthrow has been given, and it has been shown by considering the success of Aurelian in establishing a solar cult that the emperor-priest failed to establish his god at Rome as a result of his disregard for Roman tradition and way of life.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| A. J. A. ..... | American Journal of Archaeology |
| Bib. and Sem. Symb. ..... | Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism |
| C. A. H. ..... | Cambridge Ancient History |
| C. I. L. ..... | Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum |
| Cult. Or. ..... | I Culti Orientali ad Ostia |
| Enc. Brit. ..... | Encyclopaedia Britannica |
| H. Th. R. ..... | Harvard Theological Review |
| I. G. ..... | Inscriptiones Graecae |
| Myst. Mith. ..... | The Mysteries of Mithra |
| O. C. D. ..... | The Oxford Classical Dictionary |
| Or. Rel. ..... | The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism |
| Ph. S. ..... | Philologische Studien |
| R. E. ..... | Real-Encyclopädie der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft |
| Rel. Sem. ..... | Lectures on the Religion of the Semites |
| Rel. Sév. ..... | La Religion à Rome sous Les Sévères |
| Rel. Rom. ..... | Histoire Politique et Psychologique de La Religion Romaine |
| Rep. Coin. ..... | The Coinage of the Roman Republic |
| R. I. C. ..... | The Roman Imperial Coinage |
| Röm. Rel. ..... | Römische Religionsgeschichte |

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|---|---|
| R. u. K. d. R. ..... | Religion und Kultus der Römer |
| S. H. A. ..... | Scriptores Historiae Augustae |
| Stud. of Hel. ..... | Studies in the Life of Heliogabalus |
| T. A. P. A. ..... | Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association |
| Top. Dict. Anc. Rom. ..... | A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome |
| W. G. ..... | Die Welt als Geschichte |

# CHAPTER I

## THE GROWTH OF SUN-WORSHIP IN THE ROMAN WORLD

The sun has been worshipped in almost every region of the earth at some period in its history, and many of the great civilisations of the past have given a place of prominence to their particular solar deity;[1] we also find that in at least two places the rulers have been closely associated with the sun.[2] A survey of religous activity throughout the Roman Empire until the accession of Elagabalus will show that sun-worship played an increasingly important role. Consideration of the reign of Elagabalus himself in the following chapters will reveal a sun god as the chief deity of the Roman Empire and the emperor its chief priest.

At the beginning of the third century of our era several solar cults were found to be thriving in Rome and throughout the whole of the Empire; these cults spread originally from the East by various means which will be discussed later in this chapter. Apart from these oriental cults, however, there was a native Italian sun deity usually referred to as Sol Indiges whose worship seems to owe little or nothing to outside influence.[3]

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1 See J. Hawkes, Man and the Sun (London: Cresset Press, 1962), pp. 62ff. worship of Oshatsh by the Pueblo; pp. 79ff. the semitic sun god Shamash; pp. 127ff. the worship of the sun by the Incas pp. 167ff. Stonehenge as a place of sun worship. Also A. Erman, A Handbook of Egyptian Religion (transl. by A. S. Griffith, London: Constable, 1907), p. 10.

2 See J. Hawkes, op. cit., p. 128, Incas; p. 90, Pharaohs.

3 For discussion of the origin of Sol Indiges see Marbach, R. E. II 5 (1927), s.v. "Sol", col. 902.

Sol Indiges did not hold a very important place amongst the gods at Rome, but Varro[4] says that Sol and Luna occupied second place to Juppiter and Tellus amongst those gods beneficient to farmers. We know of two temples dedicated to the Roman Sol: one in the Circus Maximus and the other on the Quirinal. The literary evidence for the existence of the former temple is to be found in Tacitus[5] and Tertullian[6], and the position of the shrine seems to be connected with the protection of the quadrigarii, as Sol was worshipped as the god who drove the four-horsed sun-chariot.[7] The day of dedication of this temple is given in the calendar of Philocalus as the twenty-eighth of August.[8] The temple of Sol on the Quirinal is mentioned in Quintilian[9] and an inscription[10] gives us the date of dedication as the ninth of August.[11]

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4 Varro, On Agriculture, I, 1, 5.

5 Tacitus, Annales, IV, 74.

6 Tertullian, De Spectaculis, 8.

7 Since chariot races were frequently held in the Circus Maximus and the quadriga was portrayed on the frieze of this temple the connection seems feasible, cf, Marbach, R. E. II 5, col. 903.

8 C. I. L. I p. 270 and p. 327.

9 Quintilian, De Institutione Oratoria, I, 7, 12.

10 C. I. L. I p. 244 and p. 324.

11 It is possible that there was a festival for Sol Indiges on the tenth of December, but a discussion on this matter would be out of place here, cf, Marbach, R. E. II 5, col. 903.

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Although Sol played no great part in Roman mythology and is rarely mentioned in Latin literature,[12] we can see from the evidence given above and from types of republican coins[13] that a solar cult definitely had a place in Roman religion. The Sun as a divinity seems to have become more important during the Principate of Augustus. He gave a prominent place to Apollo, who had a temple in Rome as early as 431 B.C. built on the Campus Martius,[14] erecting a temple for him on the Palatine which was dedicated on the ninth of October 28 B.C.[15] Augustus considered that it was through the help of Apollo that he was victorious at Actium[16] and consequently the god was given the epithet Actius.[17] A further indication of a growing interest in the Sun as a divine power is to be found in the erection of two obelisks dedicated to a sun god[18] by Augustus after

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12 Tacitus, Annales, XV, 74 and Virgil, Georgics, I, 466.

13 E. A. Sydenham, The Coinage of the Roman Republic, (London: Spink and Son Ltd., 1952), p. 9. no. 96 and p. 58. no. 487. portray Sol on their reverse sides.

14 See Livy, IV, 29, 7, and S. B. Platner, A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome, (Oxford University Press, London: Humphrey Milford, 1929), p. 15.

15 Platner, Top. Dict. Anc. Rom., pp. 16ff.

16 Propertius, II, 31.

17 Prop. IV, 6, 67.

18 C. I. L. VI, 701, 702. These two obelisks were taken by Augustus from Heliopolis. See Platner, op. cit., pp. 366-67.

his conquest for Egypt. Since it is not clear to what sun god Augustus dedicated these monuments we can only go so far as to say that Augustus had respect for Apollo and Sol, and to conclude perhaps that some relationship existed between the two. Literary evidence would appear to substantiate this claim, although Fontenrose contends that Apollo and Sol were in no way connected at this time; he claims that it was the early Christian writers who caused later ages to think of Apollo as having been primarily a sun god.[19] Phoebus, however, appears to refer to both Apollo and the sun in the Carmen Saeculare[20] of Horace, Cicero[21] indicates that Apollo and Sol are the same, and Macrobius[22] and Plutarch[23] both imply that there was some confusion in distinguishing between these two gods. It seems that both Apollo and Sol were associated with the quadriga.[24] Although it cannot be

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19 J. E. Fontenrose, "Apollo and Sol in the Latin poets of the first century B.C." in T. A. P. A., v. 70, 1939, pp. 439-455.

20 H. J. Rose, Oxford Classical Dictionary, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), s.v. Sol, p. 847., considers this an identification of Apollo with Helios but F. Altheim, A History of Roman Religion, (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1938), says that this is not necessarily so. A more detailed discussion of the merits of their arguments would, however, go beyond the scope of this study.

21 Cicero, De Natura Deorum, II, 68.

22 Macrobius, Saturnalia, I, 17, 1.

23 Plutarch, Moralia, 400 c, d.

24 See Marbach, R. E. II 5 col. 903 and Sydenham Rep. Coin., p. 58, no. 487, p. 59, no. 489.

said that Apollo and Sol were identifiable, there seems to be justification for the belief that a definite similarity between the two led to confusion that resulted in the loss of their separate identities at a later date.

However, the principal influence on sun-worship in the Roman Empire came from the East, and some mention must be made of the oriental deities associated with the sun before we can establish the position of its worship at the beginning of the third century.

Those cults which clearly can be considered as solar are the oriental religionsinvolving the worship of Mithras and the Syrian baals.[25] The most important appears to have been Mithraism which appeared at least as early as the fourth century B.C. in Persia.[26] The military expeditions of Trajan, Lucius Verus and of Septimius Severus in the East and their annexations were the first causes of the widespread diffusion of Mithraism throughout the Latin World. To be sure, Plutarch[27] implies earlier Roman contact with this cult when he tells of initiation into the mysteries of Mithras through Cilician pirates conquered by Pompey

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25 There are other cults which may be loosely connected with the sun but which we cannot classify as solar cults during the first two centuries A.D. At a later date many of the cults at Rome became associated with the sun, cf., Attis in F. Cumont, The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism, (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1911) p. 61. and more generally in J. Bayet, Histoire Politique et Psychologique de la Religion Romaine, (Paris: Payot, 1957), p. 251.

26 J. Hawkes, Man and the sun, pp. 181ff.

27 Vita Pompeii, 24.

the Great, but the beginning of widespread popularity was probably later.

Mithras seems to have had a particular appeal to soldiers, presumably the result of two factors in his worship: the first was that the legends of Mithras portrayed him as a strong and courageous character, and the second was that women were excluded from his worship.[28] J. Hawkes sums up the appeal of Mithras by saying, "with morality, courage, equal brotherhood, participation in the mystery and assurance of a celestial after-life for the virtuous to say nothing of imperial sympathy[29] — Mithraism was indeed an attractive faith."[30] Since Mithraism was attractive to soldiers who had come into close contact with its practice ever since the Eastern campagins of Pompey,it is hardly surprising that the army became the principal agent of its spread throughout the empire.[31]

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28 A discussion of the rites and legends of Mithraism, though an extremely popular cult at this time, is unnecessary here but an excellent account is contained in F. Cumont, The Mysteries of Mithras, (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1903). Our only concern is that he is a sun-god which can be seen from the fact that he was referred to as Sol Invictus Mithras — F. Cumont, Myst. Mith., p. 50.

29 C. I. L. VI, 738 — Septimius Severus dedicated a sanctuary to Mithras.

30 J. Hawkes, Man and the sun, p. 185.

31 The evidence for the worship of Mithras throughout the empire as spread by the army is too vast to consider here but C. I. L. VI, 716, shows its popularity amongst military circles at Rome.

Many barbarians were enlisted into the ranks of the legions, and the auxilia were usually made up entirely of barbarians from one particular area. These people continued to worship their native deities wherever they were stationed, and an assimilation of their gods with the Olympian gods[32] seems to have aided in the spread of their cults amongst their fellow soldiers. As early as sixty-nine A.D. we find the troops of Mucianus, supporting Vespasian for the Principate, bowing down and worshipping the sun at Cremona[33] and although this legion, the VIth Ferrata, probably returned to Syria,[34] some of the auxiliaries, in all likelihood, remained to spread their solar cult; this does at least show that the necessary movements of troops could play a part in spreading solar cults.[35] From the time of Hadrian the army was largely static, but circumstances at different times necessitated the movement of legions. A native of a certain area who had been promoted to the rank of centurion was usually moved, and the auxilia were generally made to serve far from their homeland. These features, among others, allowed the dispersal

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32 i.e., Juppiter Dolichenus whom we shall consider shortly.

33 Tacitus, Histories, III, 24.

34 H. M. D. Parker, The Roman Legions, (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1958), p. 144.

35 F. Cumont, Or. Rel., p. 24.

of orientals and their cults throughout the empire.[36] Hoey[37] points out that, despite the fact that the army was a great centre for the worship of the oriental cults and an important factor in their dissemination, there is no certain proof that these religions were prescribed for celebration by the troops, nor that there were any dedications to oriental deities within the actual praetorium of a camp. There exists ample evidence[38] of the remains of temples to oriental deities outside the legionary camps and the auxiliary forts of the limes.

Mithraism was not the only solar cult popular in the army and thus spread by the various postings of soldiers. The many Syrian troops, whose devotion to the sun was noted at the battle of Cremona,[39] continued to worship their baals, all of whom were identified with the sun.[40] The Baal of Doliche, worshipped as Juppiter Dolichenus, seems to have enjoyed considerable popularity in the army.[41] The first carriers of the cult seem to have been the Cohortes Commagenorum under the Flavians[42] and the earliest known inscription to this god dates from the year 138 A. D.[43]

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36 F. Cumont, Myst. Mith., p. 40.

37 A. S. Hoey, "Official policy towards Oriental cults in the Roman Army", in T. A. P. A., v. 70, 1939, pp. 456ff.

38 A. S. Hoey, loc. cit., notes 33 and 34.

39 See above n. 33 on p. 7.

40 See Servius on Virgil Aeneid, I, 1.729 and 1.642 and Macrobius Sat., I, 17.

41 M. Squarciapino, I Culti Orientali ad Ostia, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), p. 60.

42 K. Latte, Römische Religionsgeschichte, (München: C. H. Beck, 1960), p.348.

43 C. I. L. VI, 30943.

He appears on an inscription found along Hadrian's Wall dating from the time of Antoninus Pius,[44] and his popularity in the military circle at Rome is evident from several inscriptions;[45] and in fact, inscriptions to Juppiter Dolichenus can be found from almost every military outpost in the empire.[46] He appears as a warrior wearing a beard and holding a double-headed axe in his right hand and lightning in his left hand while standing on a bull.[47]

The appearance of an inscription to Juppiter Dolichenus at the port of Puteoli[48] suggests that he was worshipped outside military circles, and that the Oriental solar cults were diffused by means other than the army. Trade and slavery immediately suggest themselves as agents for the spread of Syrian worship throughout Italy and the empire, an assumption for which there is a good deal of supporting evidence.

The first close contact between Syria and Rome was made as a result of Pompey's Eastern Campaign, and it must be assumed that a least from

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44 C. I. L. VII, 506.

45 C. I. L. VI, 414, 417.

46 G. La Piana, "Foreign Groups in Rome during the first centuries of the Empire", in Harvard Theological Review, v. 20, 1927, p. 286 n. 9 and J. Réville, La Religion à Rome sous les Sévères, (Paris: Ernest Levous, 1886), p. 50.

47 G. Wissowa, Religion und Kultus der Römer, (München: Beck, 1912), p. 362.

48 C. I. L. X, 1575.

this time great numbers of Syrian slaves started to come into Italy and that trade between West and East increased considerably. Syria, a productive country in its own right,[49] was a natural trading centre; it was the link between the Mediterranean and the Far East, and her inhabitants, who were clever, pliable and eager for a quick profit,[50] soon established themselves throughout the empire. We find some Syrian merchant with two factories in the Rhône Basin[51] and others established in Spain.[52]

In Italy itself the Syrians were well established at Puteoli and Rome, and to a lesser extent at Ostia – there was a colony from Tyre established in Puteoli,[53] a statio of Palmyra at Rome[54] and there are a few inscriptions of Syrians at Ostia, but it seems likely that although they were active at Portus they preferred to live in Rome.[55] It is evidently the result of the presence of these Syrian merchants that we have many inscriptions from Italy, particularly from Puteoli and Rome, dedicated to

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49 M.I. Rostovtzeff, The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 148.

50 F. Cumont, Or. Rel., pp. 23ff.

51 C. I. L. III, 14165 (8).

52 I. G. XIV, 2540.

53 I. G. XIV, 830.

54 C. I. L. VI, 710.

55 For a discussion on the Syrian merchants at Rome and the ports see particularly pp. 243-244, n. 64, p. 274, n. 18 in T. Frank, An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome, v. 5, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1940).

the several baals, their local solar cults, each associated with the name of Juppiter, the chief god of the Romans. Juppiter Heliopolitanus appears to have been worshipped at Rome[56], Puteoli[57] and perhaps Ostia[58], Juppiter Dolichenus, whom we have mentioned as being particularly popular in the army, was worshipped at Rome[59] and Puteoli[60], and Juppiter Damascenus was worshipped at Rome[61] as was Malakbel, a Palmyrene solar deity[62]. These gods were different personifications of the same solar divinity[63] probably differing in little more than their native names[64]. They combined the attributes of the Greco-Roman Juppiter and the Syrian baals with a strong Oriental element[65].

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56 C. I. L. VI, 422, 423.

57 C. I. L. X, 1634.

58 C. I. L. XIV, 24. M. Squarciapino points out that this does not necessarily indicate the presence of a temple despite a considerable Syrian population. (Cult. Or. p. 62.).

59 C. I. L. VI, 411, 414, 415, 417.

60 C. I. L. X, 1575.

61 C. I. L. VI, 405.

62 C. I. L. VI, 710.

63 See J. Réville, Rel. Sév., pp. 70ff. and G. Wissowa, R. u. K. d. R.,p. 364.

64 Damascenus, Dolichenus, Heliopolitanus indicate the places where these cults originated. It is not unlikely that there were several others of which we have no positive evidence.

65 Very little is known about the worship of these deities: see above n. 63 and Macrobius, Sat., I, 23, 10ff. which concerns Juppiter Heliopolitanus.

The great numbers of Syrian slaves in Rome[66] and Italy undoubtedly played a part in the spread of their solar cults: it is easy to imagine a Syrian chambermaid telling her mistress the attractions of her religion, or a Syrian working on one of the big Italian estates doing the same amongst his fellow workers. The stability of the Empire during the second century A.D. which led to ease of communication, and thus increased the frequency and extent of travel, must also have helped to bring westerners into contact with the exciting mysteries of the East.

To become popular these oriental solar cults must have had some attraction over the traditional religion of Rome, as well as the means of gaining influence in Italy mentioned above. The failings of Roman polytheism opened the gate for oriental monotheism[67] and enabled it to gain a foothold: W. Warde Fowler[68], for instance, says that the only moral influence that could be ascribed to the state religion was that it helped to give a sense of law and order, that served to keep the family sound and wholesome. Otherwise it merely numbed the religious instinct.

The state religion was cold and prosaic, full of dry wordy formulae like those of the law courts, incapable of giving the worshipper any

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66 They seem to have been especially popular as litter bearers, see Juvenal, Satire VI, 351; Martial, IX, 2, 11; 22, 9.

67 G. Wissowa, R. u. K. d. R., p. 359.

68 W. Warde Fowler, The Religious Experience of the Roman People, (London: Macmillan, 1911), p. 228.

emotional satisfaction; it appeared only as a contract -- sacrifices in exchange for favours -- and must have seemed one-sided to the majority of people.[69] The Roman people, therefore, greedy for emotion and belief turned to the practice of various oriental cults. They were attracted by the excitement of their mysteries, the splendour of their ceremonies and the ecstasy of the vertiginous dancing and music. Their minds were seduced by the ideas of a cleansing from guilt offered by initiation ceremonies, a closer and more intimate relationship with the divine and a final judgement according to good and bad deeds.[70] In other words these cults satisfied their senses and passions, their intelligence and their conscience.[71] An interest in these solar cults on the part of some of the Emperors[72] also enhanced their acceptance by the Roman people.

Numismatic evidence is significant in considering the sun as a god at Rome: we find Sol used as a coin type as early as the beginning of the second century B.C.[73] and he appears as a head, bust or as a figure standing

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69
F. Cumont, Or. Rel., p. 29; K. Latte, Röm. Rel., p. 342.

70
It is interesting to note that these cults and Christianity both had a similar appeal, a fact which might well have made these cults a considerable obstacle to the spread of Christianity.

71
F. Cumont, Or. Rel., pp. 28ff.

72
Nero and Commodus were interested in Mithraism, see F. Cumont, Myst. Mith., p. 85, p. 83; C. I. L. VI, 410, 419 are dedications of Severus to Juppiter Dolichenus.

73
E. A. Sydenham, Rep. Coin., p. 9, no. 96.

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in a quadriga on the coins of Augustus[74], Vespasian[75], Trajan[76], Hadrian[77], and Commodus[78]. On the coins of Septimius Severus, Geta and Caracalla, Sol appears more frequently and has a more authoritative position: he is portrayed holding a whip[79] or globe[80] in many instances, and sometimes appears together with the inscription 'Pacator Orbis'[81] or 'Rector Orbis'[82]. This would indicate that by the beginning of the third century the sun was considered by many people to be an all-powerful deity.

It seems that the various oriental cults of the sun, aided by the presence of native sun-worship at Rome and the shortcomings of the State religion, had become very popular throughout the Empire by the beginning of the third century of our era. It must be noted at this point, however,

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74 H. Mattingly and E. A. Sydenham, The Roman Imperial Coinage, (London: Spink and Son, 1962), v. 1, p. 71, no. 122.

75 R. I. C., v. 2, p. 18, no. 28.

76 R. I. C., v. 2, p. 267, nos. 326, 327, 328, 329.

77 R. I. C., v. 2, p. 426, no. 661; p. 340, no. 16; p. 345, no. 43; p. 357, no. 145; p. 360, no. 167.

78 R. I. C., v. 3, p. 379, no. 119.

79 R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 103, no. 101; p. 158, no. 492.

80 R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 246, no. 245; p. 233, no. 140.

81 R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 126, no. 282; p. 235, no. 163; p. 320, no. 50.

82 R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 233, no. 140.

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that during this time the various sun cults were practised separately; the oriental cults probably received most of their support from the orientals themselves, and that there is no evidence before the time of Elagabalus to indicate that Juppiter had been displaced as the chief Roman Deity.

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# CHAPTER II

## THE ATTEMPT OF THE EMPEROR ELAGABALUS TO SET UP HIS NATIVE BAAL AS THE CHEIF DEITY OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE.

After defeating Macrinus the new emperor Elagabalus made his way to Rome where he attempted to make his native Baal the supreme god in the Roman Empire. The attempt, had it been successful, would have greatly hastened the orientalising of the Roman Empire. Before discussing the steps taken by the Emperor to set up his cult at Rome, we should briefly consider his background and how he came to power.

On the death of Caracalla, which was followed shortly by the death of Julia Domna, his mother, Macrinus sent Julia Maesa back to her home in Emesa together with her family, but allowed her to keep the vast sums of money she had accrued as a member of the Imperial family.[1] Maesa had two daughters, Julia Soaemias[2] and Julia Mamaea,[3] both of whom were married with one son each: Soaemias and her husband, Varius Marcellus,[4] were the parents of Avitus who was fourteen in the year 218, and Mamaea and Gessius were the parents of Alexianus who was ten in the same year --

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1 Herodian, V, 3, 2.

2 This name varies in spelling in the ancient literary sources so I have given the spelling found on the coinage. See R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 60.

3 This name varies in spelling in the ancient literary sources so I have given the spelling found on the coinage. See R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 97.

4 The name of the husband of Julia Soaemias is that found on an inscription made at his death. C. I. L. X, 6569.

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they were all Syrians.[5] These two boys became the emperors Elagabalus[6] and Severus Alexander.

This fourteen year old boy was the hereditary high – priest[7] of Elagabalus, a god who was worshipped at Emesa in a magnificently decorated[8] temple built high above the city.[9] Here he was worshipped not only by the inhabitants of Emesa but by many of the surrounding satraps who brought him sacrifices each year.[10] Not far from the city of Emesa was

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5 For this family tree cf. Dio Cassius 79, 30, 2-3; S. H. A., Macrinus, IX, 1-2; Herod., V, 3, 3.

6 At this point an explanation of the complex variations of the names of this emperor should be given: his real name, as we noted, was Varius Avitus, but he was hailed emperor under the name of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, since his grandmother, Maesa, claimed that he was the son of Caracalla (Herod., V, 3, 10-12; Eutropius, VIII, 22.), and it is under this name that he appears on coins and inscriptions. As the hereditary priest of the god Elagabalus, the Baal of Emesa, the emperor became known by this name, but not, it would seem, during his reign (He is not referred to under this name by the contemporary writers, Dio Cassius and Herodian. See O. F. Butler, Studies in the Life of Heliogabalus, [New York: Macmillan, 1908], p. 119). The Latin writers Aurelius Victor, Eutropius and those of the S. H. A. erroneously use the name Heliogabalus by confusion with the greek 'helios' presumably (for Elagabalus was a sun god), Victor and S. H. A. for the god and the emperor, Eutropius just for the god. He was sometimes referred to as Bassianus (S. H. A., Macrinus, VIII, 4; IX, 4; Herod., V, 3, 6.), but there is nothing to indicate that this was ever an official name. He is also referred to by 'nick names' in certain places. All unqualified references to Elagabalus in this work will refer to the god. The etymology of the word Elagabalus will be discussed at the beginning of the following chapter.

7 Herod., V, 3, 6.

8 Herod., V, 3, 9.

9 See F. Altheim, "Sol Invictus", in Die Welt als Geschichte, 1939, p. 292, n. 6.

10 Herod., V, 3, 4.

stationed a military camp from which the soldiers used to come to watch the young priest[11] who Herodian says was extremely beautiful.[12] Julia Maesa, who seems to have been a very ambitious woman, spread amongst the soldiers the rumour that the young priest was the son of Caracalla[13] and let it be known that she was prepared to offer all her money to the soldiers, if they would restore imperial power to her family.[14]

The family was received into the camp by night, and the boy was hailed Marcus Aurelius Antoninus.[15] When Macrinus heard of this, he sent a small force under Julianus to put down the rebels; his troops deserted, and Julianus was decapitated. His head was sent back to Macrinus. Macrinus then marched and attacked the army of Elagabalus, only to be defeated through his own cowardice and the desertion of some of his troops on the eighth of June, 218. He fled, but was finally captured and killed together with his son Diadumenianus at Chalcedon.[16]

After his victory the young Elagabalus sent official notice to Rome of his accession. Butler considers that this would have reached Rome

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11 Herod., V, 3, 9.

12 Herod., V, 3, 7, and also C. A. H., (Cambridge: University Press, 1961), vol. of plates, V, 168 c and d.

13 Herod., V, 3, 10; S. H. A., Macrinus, IX, 4.

14 Herod., V, 3, 11; S. H. A., Macrinus, IX, 4.

15 S. H. A., Macrinus, IX, 4; Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 31, 3; Herod., V, 3, 12.

16 Herod., V, 4, 1-12; S. H. A., Macrinus, X, 1-3; Dio Cassius, LXXIX, 31, 4-45, 5.

about July the twelfth or thirteenth.[17] After remaining in Antioch for a while he set out for Rome, but decided to winter at Nicomedia where he celebrated fervently the rites of his god.[18] In the spring of 219 he set out for Rome where he arrived at some period during the summer[19] and began the short reign that has given him one of the blackest names in Roman history.

Even before the new emperor entered Rome, he set about making his god the supreme deity and took steps to see that the seriousness of his undertaking would be realised. Julia Maesa was troubled by his antics at Nicomedia and advised the boy to enter Rome in Roman costume, but he, whether through childish obstinacy or whether he considered that Elagabalus had given him the imperial power in order to spread his cult, moved right away from Roman tradition: in order that the senate and people of Rome might become accustomed to the sight of his apparel and to test their reaction to his appearance while he was out of Rome, he sent a huge picture of himself as he appeared when making a favourable sacrifice

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17
O. F. Butler, Stud. of Hel., pp. 62-63. She bases her argument on the fact that he was admitted to the Arval brotherhood on the fourteenth of July, for which see C. I. L. VI, 2001, 2009.

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Herod., V, 5, 3.

19
O. F. Butler, op. cit., p. 75 concludes that he arrived about the eleventh of July since Eutropius, VIII, 22, implies that he died two years and eight months after his arrival and Dio Cassius, LXXX, 3, 3, says that he reigned for three years, nine months and four days. His death, therefore, can be dated to the eleventh of March 222 because we are told that he became emperor on the eighth of June 218 (see p. 18).

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to the image of his native god, to be set up in the Senate House above the head of the statue of Victory.[20]

In addition to this he required that the senators should offer sacrifice and pour libations before the portrait, and he ordered officials and those people who carried out sacrifices to call upon the new god Elagabalus before the other gods.[21] This oriental priest, then, even before appearing in Rome in person, had dared to set his god above Juppiter, an action that was particularly vexing to the Romans.[22]

Butler[23] thinks it is improbable that the emperor should have had this portrait set up in the Curia and have ordered the senators to sacrifice first to Elagabalus, on the grounds that Maesa would not have allowed him to violate public policy so flagrantly. Since Herodian,[24] however, says that he despised her words, and all the sources give instances of his disregard for Roman feeling despite Maesa's presence at court, Miss Butler seems to me to have no basis for this argument. She suggests that perhaps Herodian misplaced these events, but with no evidence to contradict Herodian we are forced to accept what he says as it does not seem intrinsically improbable. Since the whole of the young priest's reign demonstrates his fanaticism for his god, there seems

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20 Herod., V, 5, 5 -7.

21 Herod., V, 5, 7.

22 Dio Cassius, LXXX, 11, 1.

23 O. F. Butler, Stud., of Hel., p. 73.

24 Herod., V, 5, 6.

no reason for finding his action, as Herodian relates it, unlikely at this point.

When the emperor-priest arrived at Rome with the black, conical stone, the symbol of the cult of Elagabalus, the people were not surprised by his appearance,[25] and in theory his god was already in a position above the gods of the Roman pantheon. He began to celebrate the rites of his god immediately, and seems to have considered that he was giving great honour to those whom he allowed to take part in the ceremonies; these were always men of high rank.[26] If this is true, it suggests that he was acting not like a boy trying to spite the Romans, but rather as a priest who was devoted to his god and regarded it as his duty to make that god the most important deity in the Empire; at the same time he tried to give the Roman people a place in the worship of his god.

Once he was at Rome he arranged for a temple to be built in which the rites of his cult could be celebrated with as much splendour as they were at Emesa. It seems from what Herodian tells us,[27] that until the temple was completed, the stone of Emesa was kept in the royal palace. The temple of Elagabalus was built on the Palatine near to the Imperial Palace[28] and was dedicated in 221.[29] There have been doubts in the past that

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25 Herod., V, 5, 7.

26 Herod., V, 5, 10.

27 Herod., V, 6, 3, says that the statue of Pallas was brought into the palace to be married to his god.

28 Aurelius Victor, De Caesaribus, 23; S. H. A., Heliogabalus, 1, 6; Herod., V, 5, 8.

29 Platner, Top. Dict. Anc. Rom., p. 199.

[illegible]

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this temple was actually situated on the Palatine but a more recent study by D. F. Brown plainly removed these doubts.[30] Herodian[31] describes the temple as very big and very beautiful, and since he also tells us that the temple at Emesa was lavishly decorated with gold, silver and precious stones, perhaps one may assume that the temple at Rome was decked out with equal splendour.[32] Although, as Butler points out,[33] archaeologists are not certain whether or not they have located the ruins of the Elagaballium, it is probably a safe assumption that a capital recovered in Rome depicting the stone of Emesa surmounted by an eagle, Pallas and Juno, is from this temple.[34]

The emperor built another magnificent temple in the suburbs, to which the stone symbol of Elagabalus was transported with great pomp at the height of each summer.[35] According to the Historia Augusta[36]

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30 cf. Platner, op. cit., p. 199 and D. F. Brown, A. J. A., v. 42, 1938, p. 129.

31 Herod., V, 5, 8.

32 Herod., V, 3, 4.

33 O. F. Butler, Stud. of Hel., p. 81.

34 F. Cumont, R. E. X, col. 2221.

35 Herod., V, 6, 6. Cumont, R. E. X, col. 2221 and Wissowa, R. u. K. d. R., p. 306 consider that this temple was erected near the Porta Praenestina (modern Porta Maggiore) in the area known as 'Ad Spem Veterem'. The transference of the stone each summer will be considered in the following chapter.

36 S. H. A., Hel., XXIV, 7.

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he also intended to build a huge column that could be ascended from the inside, so that he could place his god on the top. He was, however, apparently unable to find sufficient stone. The building of two magnificent temples to his god in such a short period of time certainly indicates that the emperor was determined to give a place of prominence at Rome to Elagabalus.

There is a possibility that the young emperor went so far as to set up a priesthood of Elagabalus at Rome, of which he was the chief priest.[37] We have an inscription,[38] found at Rome, dedicated to a certain Tiberius Iullus Balbillus who is described as a priest of the sun god Elagabalus (the spelling in the inscription is Alagabalus). A second inscription[39]

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[37] That he was the chief priest will become evident when we examine the inscriptions on his coins later in this chapter.

[38] C. I. L. VI, 2269.

[39] This particular inscription poses problems: it reads

AQUILA
SOLI
ALAGABALO
IULIUS·BALBILLUS

..... this, as it stands makes little sense. Mommsen's suggestion that aquila should be taken as accusative could make sense if this inscription was taken from the pedestal of a statue perhaps representing an eagle on the stone of Emesa (see R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 32, no. 61— a coin depicting an eagle on the stone of Emesa). The inscription would then read "Iulius Balbillus (dedicates) an eagle to the sun Elagabalus". This would be an act befitting his role as a priest of the cult. The eagle as a symbol of the cult of Elagabalus will be discussed in the next chapter.

couples this same Tiberius Iullus Balbillus with Sol Elagabalus, but the association between the two cannot be assumed to be that of priest and god simply from their appearance together on the inscription. The first inscription, however, suffices to show that Tiberius Iullus Balbillus was a priest of Elagabalus at some time. There are three additional inscriptions[40] that carry this man's name and they all refer to him as a priest of the sun (ie. sacerdos solis). These, however, are dated before the accession of the emperor Elagabalus and since we have no positive evidence to indicate that the 'sol' here referred to is Elagabalus we must accept that we are dealing with some other sun god, probably the native Sol of Italy.

Thus Tiberius Iullus Balbillus was a priest of Sol; there is no indication of a cult of the Syrian god before its introduction by the emperor. Therefore, it seems most likely that Tiberius Iullus Balbillus became a priest of "Alagabalus" after the introduction of the cult at Rome. But why should a priest of Sol also become a priest of Elagabalus? It must be remembered that Sol Invictus Elagabalus was now regarded, at least officially by the government, as the chief deity of the Empire. A priesthood would have been needed to administer the expanded cult. Under these circumstances it is reasonable to surmise that the emperor established a priesthood by incorporating priests from other solar cults. Although, of course, this cannot be presented as a certainty, the fact that other of his actions, such as the theft of various sacred images, indicate a

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40 C. I. L. VI, 2129, 2130, 2270.

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uniting of other religions under Elagabalus, does support the above conjecture.[41]

Perhaps the most daring action on the part of the emperor in his attempt to establish the absolute sovereignty of Elagabalus was the removal of the various cult images to his temple. The Historia Augusta[42] says that the young priest, after building the temple on the Palatine, wished to transfer to it the image of the Mother,[43] the fire of Vesta, the Palladium, the ancilia and all those things venerated by the Romans. With the exception of the image of the Mother these sacred objects were all from the temple of Vesta served by the Pontifex Maximus and the Vestal Virgins, the centre of Roman religious life. He brought the statue of Pallas, which he considered to be the image of Vesta,[44] from its shrine in

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41 Cumont, R. E. X, col., 2221 implies that C. I. L. VI, 708, 2129, 2130, 2269, 2270 refer to Balbillus as priest of the sun Elagabalus, but since 2129, 2130 and 2270 are dated by the consuls to 201, 215, 199 A.D. respectively and make no mention of Elagabalus, he seems to assume more than he should. La Piana, H. Th. R., v. XX, 1927, p. 318, n. 97 makes the same assumption with C. I. L. VI, 2270 and also goes so far as to say that C. I. L. VI, 708, 2269, 2270 are the only inscriptions to mention Elagabalus: as I have pointed out C. I. L. VI, 2270 does not mention Elagabalus, but several other inscriptions which we shall be looking at later, do mention the name of the god. Latte, Röm. Rel., p. 349 mentions the difference between 'sacerdos solis' and 'sacerdos solis Elagabali' but refers to C. I. L. VI, 1663 and 2119 on which I find no reference to Balbillus or the sun.

42 S. H. A., Hel. , III, 4.

43 See S. H. A., Hel., (ed. D. Magie), p. 110, n. 4. The reference to the image of the Mother (presumably the Magna Mater) probably refers to the image of Ourania (see p. 26, n. 49) as the two were connected.

44 S. H. A., Hel., VI, 9. There was no actual image of Vesta.

order that she might marry his god Elagabalus[45], presumably to unite Roman religion with his cult. The fact that he also married a Vestal Virgin, Aquila Severa, an act which he claimed was sanctioned because they were priest and priestess, serves to corroborate this idea.[46] The emperor then decided that Pallas was too warlike for his god[47] and looked elsewhere for a consort for Elagabalus; he also divorced Aquila Severa,[48] perhaps because Roman feeling ran high against him on this point.

The emperor then sent to Carthage for the statue of Ourania, who was associated with the moon, and married her to Elagabalus thus matching the sun and the moon.[49] The two images were set up side by side, and all of Italy was ordered to celebrate the marriage of the gods with feasts and carnivals.[50] The capital[51] portraying Pallas, Juno and the stone of Emesa may well be an illustration of the two marriages,[52] as Juno and

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45 Herod., V, 6. 3.

46 S. H. A., Hel., VI, 6; Herod., V, 6, 4. N.B. also the Semitic idea of priests and priestesses impersonating their godhead, see W. R. Smith, Lectures on the Religion of the Semites, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1914), p. 44 and p. 66.

47 Herod., V, 6, 4.

48 Herod., V, 6, 2.

49 Herod., V, 6, 4-5; Dio Cassius, LXXX, 12, 1.

50 Herod., V, 6, 5. Butler, Stud. of Hel., pp. 89-91 thinks that the reasons for this marriage were economic because of the dowry demanded with Ourania mentioned in Herodian, but she herself mentions that Ourania was of Semitic origin and was also associated with the moon. These two factors would make her the ideal heavenly partner in the eyes of someone so ambitious for his god, economic factors aside.

51 See Cumont, R. E. X, col. 2221.

52 F. Altheim, "Sol Invictus", in W. G., 1939, p. 292.

Ourania were both connected with the moon,[53] although it could simply be a portrait of the image of Elagabalus with two of the important gods of the Romans.

According to the Historia Augusta[54] he also took the sacred rites of the Magna Mater and went through the ordeal known as the Taurobolium (an initiation by bull's blood), so that he could snatch away the images and sacred objects kept hidden in the shrines and set them up in the temple of his own god. We are also told[55] that the emperor said that Jewish and Samaritan worship together with the rites of the Christians were to be transferred to the temple of Elagabalus, so that the Priesthood of Elagabalus would include the mysteries of every cult. Although the authenticity of the passage is doubted,[56] it appears from other statements that the young priest was determined to ensure the success of his religion at the expense of all other cults;[57] indeed, he claimed that all the gods were servants of his god.[58]

The importance that the Emperor gave to his priesthood of Elagabalus is made very clear by the inscriptions of many coins from his

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53 cf. H. J. Rose, O. C. D., s.v. Juno, p. 471 and Herod., V, 6, 4.

54 S. H. A., Hel., VII, 1-2.

55 S. H. A., Hel., III, 5.

56 S. H. A., Hel., (ed. D. Magie) n. 1, p. 112 and O. F. Butler, Stud of Hel., p. 126.

57 See S. H. A., Hel., VI, 7; III, 4.

58 S. H. A., Hel., VII, 4.

reign that were issued at Rome and Antioch. Several coins have the inscription INVICTUS SACERDOS AUG.,[59] others read SACERD. DEI SOLIS ELAGAB.,[60] and some have SUMMUS SACERDOS AUG.[61] There are also other coin types which do not actually mention the priesthood, but refer to the emperor as SANCT. DEO SOLI ELAGABAL.[62] Despite this emphasis on the priesthood of Elagabalus the official titles of the emperor, including Pontifex Maximus, remain the same on his coinage. On the inscriptions, however, he is usually styled M. AURELIUS ANTONINUS PIUS FELIX AUGUSTUS, SACERDOS AMPLISSIMUS DEI INVICTI SOLIS ELAGABALI, PONT. MAX.....[63] This confirms the literary sources when they state, as we noted above, that the emperor was determined to place his god above all others, since the Priesthood of Elagabalus is inscribed before the Pontifex Maximus on these inscriptions.

During the emperor's reign there is a great increase in the number of coins portraying Sol, although the type he uses is, for the most part,

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59 R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 34, nos. 86-88, p. 43, no. 191, p. 56, no. 350.

60 R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 37, nos. 131-135, p. 43, no. 194, p. 58, nos. 369-371.

61 R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 38, nos. 146-147, p. 44, no. 200.

62 R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 37, no. 143, p. 43, nos. 195-197.

63 See C. I. L. X, 5827, VII, 585 (This is only a reconstruction of the inscription), XVI, 139-141.

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the same as that employed by the Severi before him.[64] There are some devices on the coins of this reign which give a particular emphasis to the cult of Elagabalus: a quadriga is portrayed bearing the sacred stone of Emesa surmounted by an eagle[65] and in some cases the stone is surrounded by four parasols.[66] This undoubtedly refers to the procession transferring the stone from the city temple to that in the suburbs each summer.

During this reign Elagabalus was the supreme god, and since Juppiter was the head of the Roman Pantheon some confusion resulted between Sol and Juppiter.[67] The eagle which is often portrayed standing on the stone of Emesa is the bird of Juppiter as well as that of the Semitic gods,[68] another factor which led to confusion in distinguishing between Juppiter and the Sun during this period. That the two were confused may also be the result of the association of other Syrian baals with Juppiter, a fact that was noted above.

Before the accession of the young emperor-priest at Rome the Syrian

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64 It is unnecessary to list all these coins as a few will suffice to show the similarity between the sol types of this reign and those of the Severi. R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 53, no. 300: Sol radiate, striding left, raising right hand, holding whip; p. 44, no. 198: Sol radiate, walking right, with flowing colak, holding thunderbolt and raising right hand. The sol coins of the Severi were noted in chp. I, p. 14. The inscription SOLI PROPUNGNATORI on no. 198 has a similar sense to RECTOR ORBIS and PACATOR ORBIS on those of the Severi.

65 R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 32, nos. 61, 62, 64, 65.

66 R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 37, no. 143; p. 43, nos. 195-197.

67 S. H. A., Caracalla, 11, 7 -- vel Iovi Syrio vel Soli.
S. H. A., Hel., 1, 5, -- alii solem alii Ioven dicunt.

68 G. Halsberghe, "De Eeredienst van Sol Invictus Elagaba" in Philologische Studiën, X, 1938-39, p. 50.

[illegible]

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baals were worshipped in those places in which there was a Syrian influence, such as the ports of Italy and some of the military camps, but during his reign an attempt was clearly made to subordinate all other worships to that of Elagabalus. Although he was determined that Elagabalus should be acknowledged as the supreme deity, he does seem to have been prepared to make the traditional Roman religion an acceptable part of his cult by attempting to arrange a religious alliance between Elagabalus and Pallas. The prominent place given to the Baal of Emesa during this reign, indicated by the literary sources, coins and inscriptions, appears as the work of a religious fanatic.

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# CHAPTER III

## THE NATURE OF THE WORSHIP OF ELAGABALUS

Before examining the rites of Elagabalus at Rome, we should first consider the etymology of his name to see if this will throw any light on the original nature of his worship. Elagabalus is a latinised form of two words of Semitic origin, Elâh Gabal, meaning the god Gabal.[1] Several theories have been put forward concerning the meaning of Gabal, each of which attempts to relate this word to what we know of the worship of Elagabalus. Therefore, before we go on to discuss his cult we should consider these theories with a view to establishing which of them is the most plausible.

The first theory[2] is that Gabal originally meant high or lofty and consequently he was at one time 'the god of the mountain.' Réville says that as his chief sanctuary was at Emesa in a valley the old meaning had been forgotten, but Altheim rightly points out that the temple was situated high above the actual city. A second theory[3] is that there is a connection with the old Chaldean god of fire called Gibil, and that later, the fire was assimilated with the sun. The third theory[4] is that the name came from a Syrian root, 'gebal,' meaning create and thus Elagabalus was a 'deus creator'. Réville[5] ties up the first and third theories by arguing

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1 See Cumont, R. E. X, col. 2219.

2 cf. Réville, Rel. sous les Sév., pp. 242ff; Cumont, R. E. X, col. 2219; Altheim, "Sol Invictus" in W. G., 1939, p. 292.

3 Réville, loc. cit.; Cumont, R. E. X, col. 2220.

4 Réville, loc. cit.; Cumont, R. E. X, col. 2219

5 Réville, loc. cit.

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that Elagabalus was a mountain-fertility god at one stage, and by suggesting that the conical stone of Emesa was phallic. Since phallic symbols tend to be smooth and the conical stone has many short protruberances upon its surface[6] this is surely unlikely.

We know for certain from the inscriptions examined in the previous chapter that Elagabalus was a sun god. Therefore, a theory connecting this fact with the etymology of the word 'Gabal' would seem to be the most sensible one. A mountain suggests itself as a good place from which to worship the sun, since such a vantage point would allow a view of sunrise and sunset. The Aztecs, for example, who were ardent sun-worshippers, appear to have thought along similar lines when they built the Pyramid of the Sun.[7] Since Herodian[8] says that there were many protruberances on the stone's surface and that the people who worshipped it claimed that it was sent from Heaven, it is possible that the stone was actually a meteorite, and the worshippers of Elagabalus considered it to be an image sent from the sun. The sun was also tied up with fertility since most primitive people realised that the sun was a necessity for the growing and ripening of crops. The spring and autumnal equinoxes were and still are occasions for fertility festivals amongst many people. Since mountains, fertility and fire can all be assimilated with solar worship there seems no reason why we cannot accept that Elagabalus was always worshipped as the sun.

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6 Herod., V, 3, 5.

7 See G. C. Vaillant, The Aztecs of Mexico (Pelican Books, 1961), plate 22, which shows clearly how this Pyramid stands out above the surrounding town and countryside

8 Herod., V, 3, 5.

During the period with which we are here concerned, Elagabalus was a sun god and should be considered as such in our examination of his images and rites. The material symbol of this cult was the stone described by Herodian[9] as large and cone-shaped, black in colour and marked by protruberances and impressions. As we noted above, this stone could well be a meteorite[10], and since it was sent from Heaven it was treated with great reverence. This is demonstrated by the way it is portrayed on coins under the protection of four parasols.[11]

Smith's[12] suggestions that sacred stones were merely used for sacrifical purposes may well have been true of their original use. The reverence, however, with which the stone of Emesa was treated does not indicate that it was used as a chopping block for sacrificial victims; besides, Herodian[13] tells us that special altars were used for this purpose.

This stone was clearly the centre of the worship of Elagabalus, the symbol of the god himself, and the cult's most important 'sacred object'. Elagabalus seems not to have been represented by an anthropomorphic image. Herodian[14], when he is discussing the worship of Elagabalus, states quite definitely that there is no man-made image of a god, as amongst the Greeks and Romans. Also, in the painting, which the emperor

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9 Herod., V, 3, 5.

10 T. V. Buttrey, Enc. Brit. (14th ed.), v. 2, s.v. Baetylus, p. 1030 says that there were many such images which were originally meteorites. Some were later carved, i.e. the omphalos at Delphi.

11 R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 37, no. 143; p. 43, nos. 195-197.

12 W. R. Smith, Rel. of Semites, p. 212.

13 Herod., V, 5, 8.

14 Herod., V, 3, 5.

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sent to Rome before his arrival, the 'figure' (typos) of Elagabalus is just as likely to be the stone as an anthropomorphic image of the god. The image of Juppiter Heliopolitanus, one of the Syrian baals worshipped at Rome,[15] is described by Macrobius[16] as having a whip in his right hand and a thunderbolt and ears of corn in his left hand. This image is remarkably similar to that of Sol introduced onto the coins by the Severi: Sol has the thunderbolt of Juppiter for keeping order and the whip for driving the sun chariot. The emperor Elagabalus made great use of this sol type on his coins, as we noted in the previous chapter, but to stress his particular cult he portrays the stone of Emesa. This indicates, as Herodian says, that there was no anthropomorphic image of Elagabalus despite the suggestión that the torsos of two statues that have been found are of Elagabalus.[17] The Sol type on coins, like the image of Juppiter Heliopolitanus, is the result of the merging of Roman and Syrian ideas. The cult of Elagabalus, however, remained completely oriental and regarded the stone as the only image of the god.

Further evidence suggests that there were in addition to the stone other sacred symbols connected with the worship of Elagabalus. The eagle appears to be sacred to this god: all those coins depicting the stone of

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15 See Chapter I, p. 11.

16 Macrob., I, 23, 12.

17 See Marbach, R. E. II, 5, col. 911. I regret that I was unable to look further into this matter, but at the same time feel that since the arguments about these statues appear, from what Marbach says, highly conjectural, nothing definite would have come to light to settle the dispute one way or the other.

Emesa[18] also portray an eagle perching upon it. In the previous chapter[19] we noted an inscription which, if Mommsen's suggestion is correct, was the dedication of an eagle to Elagabalus. Perhaps the high-flying eagle was looked upon as an intermediary between the earth and sun and possibly as a carrier of the spirits of the dead to their god.[20]

There are also a few symbols peculiar to the coinage of this reign which are extremely difficult to explain. Perhaps the most noteworthy of these is the portrayal of the emperor Elagabalus, on the obverse sides of many coins, with a single horn projecting from above his forehead.[21] Since this appears only during this reign it seems likely that the horn is of some religious significance. According to Farbridge[22] the horn became a general symbol of divinity amongst the Assyrians and consequently many Assyrian kings used it to symbolise their power. It had also been noticed by primitive people that the horns of wild animals were a sign of their strength and that if they were broken the animals became powerless. It seems very likely, therefore, that this Syrian priest, who became emperor, was portrayed with a horn to signify his divine power.

There may also be a similar link with some of the other symbols since a Semitic solar deity, Ningirsu, is sometimes referred to as being provided

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18 See chp. II, p. 29.

19 See chp. II, p. 23.

20 It is interesting to note that the eagle was also a symbol of the sun for the Aztecs: See Vaillant, The Aztecs of Mexico, pp. 160-161.

21 e.g. R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, plate VI, 6.

22 M. H. Farbridge, Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism, (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1923), pp. 191-192.

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with horns and at this time he is also symbolically represented by a club, an object which is often depicted in the hand of the emperor-priest while he is sacrificing.[23] This serves to demonstrate that a solar deity did exist with horn and club symbols amongst early Semitic people, a fact which could well have influenced the symbolism of Elagabalus several centuries later.

There are several coin types from this reign on which the emperor is depicted sacrificing at a lighted altar behind which a bull is crouching.[24] There may well be a connection here with the Baal of Doliche, worshipped as Rome as Juppiter Dolichenus,[25] since the bull was his sacred animal.[26] The fact that the bull was sacred to Juppiter Dolichenus and was also important in the worship of the Magna Mater[27] suggests that this animal was important generally in Syrian worship. This may well account for its presence on the coins of the reign of Elagabalus. Although this may seem the most likely explanation, it cannot be adopted with confidence as the bull had some religious significance to almost all Mediterranean people.

The only other symbol that appears to be significant is the star which occurs on about half of the coin types of this reign.[28] The star

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23 cf. Farbridge, op. cit., pp. 184-185 and R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 42, no. 181; p. 44, no. 200.

24 R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 34, no. 88; p. 43, no. 191; p. 55, nos. 327-336; p. 56, no. 350.

25 See Chp. I, p. 8 and 11.

26 Farbridge, Bib. and Sem. Symb., p. 63.

27 i.e. the Taurobolium.

28 R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 37, nos. 131-132.

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also appears on four coins of Alexander Severus,[29] all of which were minted in Antioch. The only explanation that seems to offer itself here is that the star was a solar symbol during the reign of the emperor Elagabalus and that for a short while it continued to appear on coins minted in the East where solar deities had a stronger following.

The worship of Elagabalus was elaborate and vigorous. The emperor, as chief priest, conducted the sacrifices always dressed in extravagant Oriental clothing. He wore purple cloaks with gold decoration on them, long-sleeved robes which trailed to the ground, jewel-studded tiaras, and gold bracelets and necklaces. Dressed in this finery he conducted the sacrifices, all the while dancing around the altars to the sound of flutes, pipes and cymbals which groups of Syrian women played as they danced with their priest.[30]

The emperor sacrificed great numbers of bulls and sheep each day, placing them in heaps upon the altars with all kinds of spices. He poured before the altars many jars of the finest and oldest wines so that there were streams of blood and wine running around them.[31] Gold vessels were used for carrying the entrails of the sacrificed animals and the spices. Slaves, servants or any men of low class were forbidden

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29 R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 2, p. 90, nos. 263-264; p. 94, nos. 300-301.

30 See Herod., V, 3, 6; 3, 8; 5, 3-4; 5, 9. Dio Cass., LXXX, 14, 3.

31 Herod., V, 5, 8.

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to help in the actual sacrifice with the result that army officers and senators dressed in the Phoenician manner aided in the worship of Elagabalus.[32]

It also appears that this cult involved human sacrifice.[33] The emperor is said to have gathered noble and beautiful children from all over Italy, tortured them according to his rites and examined their entrails. According to Smith[34] the sacrifice of children, particularly those of noble families, was well established amongst Semitic people.[35]

Two of our sources[36] tell us that the emperor kept the company of magicians and used charms in practising his rites. Since magical practices were common in the Orient, perhaps through the influence of Chaldean astrology,[37] it is not surprising that they have a place in the worship of Elagabalus. The shutting up in his temple at Rome of a lion, a monkey and a snake together with human genitals[38] could well

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32 Herod., V, 5, 9-10.

33 S. H. A., Hel., VIII, 1-2; Dio Cass., LXXX, 11.

34 Smith, Rel. Sem., p. 363, 372, 415, 464-5.

35 It is interesting to note that the Aztecs also carried our human sacrifices in worshipping the sun. See A. Palerm, Enc. Brit., s.v. Aztec, v. 2, pp. 937ff.

36 Dio Cassius, LXXX, 11; S. H. A., Hel., VIII, 2.

37 Cumont, Rel. Or., pp. 182-193, p. 199 discusses the related development of astrology and magic in the Orient and states that the Syrian priests were enthusiastic disciples of Chaldean astrology.

38 Dio Cassius, LXXX, 11.

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be connected with the practice of magic. The lion[39] and the snake[40] are both symbolic of power, and in fact they actually have a connection with solar worship, the genitals obviously symbolised fertility, but the monkey does not appear to have had any special significance for the ancients.

As part of the cult of Elagabalus, the young emperor had himself circumcised and also mutilated great numbers of his adherents in the same manner. Of what significance was circumcision in this cult? Unfortunately, the evidence at present available to us sheds no light on this question. Thus, just as we were unable to say above that the eagle was a carrier of spirits, we cannot state with any certainty that circumcision was part of an initiation into a good way of life that led to rewards after death. All we can say is that circumcision was a common practice amongst Egyptian and Semitic peoples and that we are unable to ascertain whether or not it had any special significance in the cult of Elagabalus. Abstention from pork was a condition of membership of the cult, but Herodian[41] says that it was Phoenician law that forbade the consumption of the flesh of swine. It seems, therefore, that circumcision and abstention from pork were both common to the people of the area in which the cult of Elagabalus flourished and not to that cult in particular.

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39 Farbridge, Bib. and Sem. Symb., p. 69

40 Farbridge, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

41 Herod., V, 6. 9.

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In addition to these direct references to the characteristics of the cult we also find in the sources general remarks about the emperor's behaviour which could also refer to his religion. There are constant references throughout the Historia Augustorum, Herodian, Dio Cassius, Eutropius and Aurelius Victor to the vile and obscene behaviour of the young emperor. Dio Cassius says[42] that the emperor wanted to castrate himself as a result of his effeminacy and not as a function of his priesthood. However, as Cumont points out,[43] the historians, being hostile to a foreigner who favoured his native customs, may have misrepresented or partly misunderstood the facts. If we look at the passage in the Golden Ass[44] which describes the worship of the Dea Syria we find that her adherents danced around in bright clothes with paint on their faces[45] in the same way that the priest of Elagabalus danced around the altars. Apuleius also says that the worshippers of the Dea Syria were referred to as "puellae" (girls) and he calls them a "chorus cinaedorum" (a bunch of sodomites). The natural conclusion here is that such perverted activities were a normal part of Syrian ritual and that they were not carried out, at least in most

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42 Dio Cass., LXXX, 11, 1.

43 Cumont, Rel. Or., p. 114.

44 Apuleius, Metamorphoses, VIII, 26-27.

45 Elagabalus also wore paint on his face. Herod., V, 6, 10.

cases, without some religious purpose.

An examination of the rites of this cult seems to indicate that it was a typical example of the monotheistic Syrian religions.[46] They combined a great many ancient Semitic religious customs which were foreign and unintelligible to the western world. To examine the possible meanings and original sources for the rites of this cult would involve a detailed study of ancient Semitic religion, a task far beyond the scope of this study.

Another characteristic of the worship of Elagabalus at Rome was the procession held each year at the height of summer when the conical stone of Emesa was borne to the temple in the suburbs from that on the Palatine. The emperor set the god on a chariot adorned with gold and precious stones, drawn by six pure white horses that were decorated with gold and varicoloured trappings. The reins appear to have been arranged before the stone to give the impression that the god himself was driving while the young priest ran backwards facing the god and holding the bridle. Since he was unable to see where he was going the road was strewn with gold. The people ran along with the procession carrying torches and throwing garlands. As well as the stone, the images of all the other gods, imperial emblems and costly offerings were carried in the procession and followed by the army. When the suburban temple was reached a great festival was held with chariot

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46 i.e. Dea Syria, Magna Mater and the various local baals.

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races and theatrical performances. The most welcome part of the celebrations must have been the scrambling for gifts that included gold and silver cups, clothes and live animals dropped from the top of a specially erected tower.[47]

It is not known if such a festival had previously been held each year at Emesa, but it is not unlikely that some sort of celebration took place at the Summer Solstice to celebrate Elagabalus when he was at the height of his power in the northern hemisphere.

One other characteristic of the worship of Elagabalus that should be mentioned here is the fact that the worshippers gathered in temples. This is important since Mithraism, a very popular cult, was celebrated in underground temples or caves; consequently, the Sol Invictus of Aurelian; worshipped in temples above ground, was more akin to the Syrian baals than to Mithraism.[48]

The cult of Elagabalus, then, was a monotheistic religion in that Sol Invictus Elagabalus was looked upon as the unconquerable omnipotent god to whom all other deities were subordinate. The symbols found on the coins, the pageantry of the worship, the emperor-priest's behaviour all indicate that this cult was typical of many that originated in the East. Although such cults had been seen in Rome before, one had never been forced upon the people in such a manner, and it is more than likely that the traditionalists objected, a fact which could well explain the

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47 Herod., V, 6, 6-9.

48 See also G. Halsberghe, "Sol Invictus Elagabal tegenover Sol Indiges en Sol Invictus Mithra", in Philologische Studien, XI, 1939-40, pp. 32-33.

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hostility of the sources to Elagabalus.

# CHAPTER IV

## THE EMPEROR-PRIEST FAILS TO CONVERT ROME

The young emperor, Elagabalus, despite his generosity to the ordinary people of Rome, was obviously resented for his Oriental eccentricities. Julia Maesa, his grandmother, who appears to have been managing the government while the emperor devoted his time to his preistly functions, was apparently aware of this growing resentment for this strange priest. Since she was unable to persuade the young Elagabalus to adopt a way of life more acceptable to the Romans, she persuaded him to adopt Alexander, his younger cousin, as Caesar. As Halsberghe[1] suggests, this almost certainly led to jealousy between Mamaea, the mother of Alexander, and Soaemias, the mother of Elagabalus. Mamaea was careful to see that Alexander in no way upset Roman traditions and remained popular with the army. Finally, the break was made in the Praetorian camp early in March 222 resulting in the murder of Elagabalus together with his mother, Soaemias, and the acclamation of Alexander as emperor.[2]

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1 G. Halsberghe, "De Eeredienst van Sol Invictus Elagabal", in Philologische Studien, X, 1938-39, p. 53.

2 An account of the downfall of the emperor Elagabalus in contained in Herod., V, 7, 1-8, 9. Dio Cassius, LXXX, 3, 3, says he reigned for 3 years 9 months 4 days which, since he became emperor on June 8th 218, means that he died on March 11th 222.

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The worship of Elagabalus at Rome disappeared in the Tiber with the bodies of the emperor and his mother. The statues that the emperor had moved from various shrines to set up in the Elagaballium were returned to their original places,[3] and the god Elagabalus was driven out of Rome altogether;[4] doubtless the stone was returned to Emesa, since it represented the god and the worship continued in this town. The Elagaballium, the temple to Elagabalus erected by the emperor on the Palatine, was not destroyed[5] but seems to have been dedicated by Severus Alexander to Juppiter Ultor;[6] this would be a natural action on the part of the new emperor to demonstrate to the Roman people his acceptance of their way of life.

The Roman people were so incensed by the objectionable conduct of the late emperor that the senate decreed a 'damnatio memoriae'. Our earlier examination of some of the inscriptions of the reign of Elagabalus indicates that the 'damnatio memoriae' was not completely successful, but his name has certainly been erased from one[7] inscription, and possibly from another.[8]

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3 Herod., VI, 1, 3.

4 Dio Cass., LXXX, 21, 2.

5 S. H. A., Hel., XVII, 8.

6 See D. F. Brown, A. J. A., 1938, p. 129.

7 C. I. L. III, 3713.

8 C. I. L. III, 3637.

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The only evidence for the worship of Elagabalus in the City was for that short period when his priest was the emperor. This is not the case outside Italy: in some of the legionary camps, even before the young priest's accession, there is evidence for the worship of Elagabalus, and certainly after the emperor's death the god continued to be worshipped at Emesa and amongst soldiers. The Sol type found on coins does not seem to have lost much ground, but this appears all along to have had no special reference to a particular solar deity. These factors merit a closer examination to see if any indication is given of what sort of people continued to worship Elagabalus and what bearing this has on his unfavourable reception at Rome.

Before the date of accession of the emperor Elagabalus at Rome, we find inscriptions in Dacia and Numidia paying tribute to the god Elagabalus. One of these inscriptions[9] tells of the dedication of a temple by a cohort of Emesans, dating sometime before the fourteenth of February 211, as it inscribes the names of the three emperors, Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Geta. Other inscriptions from Duna-Pentele in Pannonia show the presence of troops from Emesa by the year 213, and since several of these inscriptions mention Sol Invictus it could be that the reference is to Elagabalus, as the sun god most likely to have been worshipped by Emesans. Similarly, those inscriptions[11]

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9 G. Halsberghe in Ph. S., XI, 1939-40, p. 35, no. 23.

10 C. I. L. III, 10303-10325.

11 See C. I. L. VIII, 2494 and Halsberghe, op. cit., p. 35, n. 24.

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found at El-Kantara with references to a sun god also mention the presence of Emesan soldiers. This establishes the fact that Elagabalus was worshipped in at least one military camp before the accession of his priest, but it is important to note that the soldiers concerned were from Emesa, the home of this god, although it is not unlikely that these people made a few converts amongst their fellow soldiers.

Elagabalus continued to be worshipped after the death of the emperor-priest. There is an inscription[12] dedicated to Elagabalus from a military outpost in Pannonia. There is much doubt concerning its authenticity, but if it is genuine, the names of the two consuls date it to the year 249 A.D. However, aside from this rather doubtful evidence we have three coin types[13] of Uranius Antonius minted at Emesa in 254, portraying the conical stone, and these prove the survival of the cult, at least in its native city. In addition to this, the emperor Aurelian paid homage at the temple of Elagabalus at Emesa after defeating the Palmyrene queen Zenobia.[14]

Despite the rejection of the sun god Elagabalus at Rome, the type of Sol continues to appear on the coins of the succeeding emperors.[15]

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12 C. I. L. III, 4300.

13 R. I. C., v. 4, pt. 3, nos. 1, 2; p. 206, no. 8.

14 S. H. A., Aurelian, 25, 4.

15 The indices of the relevant volumes of R. I. C., serve to support this statement.

It has been noted above[16] that the Sol type was in evidence throughout the early empire and that it acquired an oriental flavour under the Severi; since it was distinct from Sol Elagabalus, although there was naturally an increase in this type between 218 and 222, there is no reason why Sol, as a coin type, should have been abandoned. Its retention suggests that it was not sun worship in its own right that was objected to at Rome, but the strange Oriental manner in which this solar deity was honoured.

It seems, then, that those who were devotees of Elagabalus, before the reign of his priest, were the only people who continued to worship him; I refer, of course, to those people who came from Emesa and the surrounding area. Sun worship survived at Rome but the orgiastic worship of this cult did not, and it returned and continued in its place of origin, at Emesa. It was here, fifty years after the death of the emperor Elagabalus, that Aurelian seems to have been inspired by the Sun, with the result that he established the worship of Sol Invictus at Rome.

At the battle of Emesa, Aurelian believed that his victory was brought about through the aid of the sun god Elagabalus. As a result of this, we are told[17], the emperor Aurelian established temples to

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[16] See Chp. I, p. 14.

[17] S. H. A., Aurel., XXV, 4-6.

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Elagabalus around Emesa and also built a temple to the Sun at Rome. A further reference[18] says that he constructed a temple of Sol at Rome and also established a pontifical college. Aurelian placed in this temple booty and statues of Helios and Bel, all of which were taken at the sack of Palmyra.[19] The Temple of the Sun at Palmyra, which was sacked by his soldiers, was restored on his orders with money from the treasure of Zenobia.[20] This evidence tells us that Aurelian respected two different solar deities, and this has led to much speculation as to which sun god Aurelian dedicated his temple to at Rome. Mattingly[21] considers the Sol of Aurelian to be Elagabalus, but Wissowa[22] thinks that it was Bel since, he claims, it could not be Mithras, as he was worshipped in caves rather than in temples, nor Elagabalus because of the 'damnatio memoriae' in 222. We noted above, however, that the erasing of the emperor Elagabalus' name was not complete, a fact which suggests that dislike for the emperor was not as widespread as the historians claim. Neither side seems to have a

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18 S. H. A., Aurel., XXV, 4-6.

19 Zosimus, 1, 61, 2; S. H. A., Aurel., XXVIII, 5.

20 S. H. A., Aurel., XXXI, 7-9.

21 C. A. H., v. XII, p. 308.

22 R. u. K. d. R., p. 367.

very strong case, since there is no indication at all that the Sol of Aurelian was worshipped in an oriental manner. On the contrary, a pontifical college was established in the Roman manner[23] and nothing on the coins indicates that one particular solar deity was being worshipped. The type of Sol used by Aurelian[24] is the same as that found on the coins of the Severi, a type which combines Greco-Roman and Oriental attributes.[25] It seems that Aurelian, although he may have been inspired in battle by Elagabalus, saw the danger of favouring one particular solar deity and decided to establish the worship of Sol Invictus in such a way that nobody would be offended and every solar cult could be reconciled with Sol Invictus. Hence, Aurelian made great use of the 'neutral' sol type on the coins, placed the Palmyrene statues in his temple, and also arranged for the building of shrines to Elagabalus at Emesa, and the refurnishing of the Sun Temple at Palmyra. The idea of Sol being the 'All' was cultivated

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23 S. H. A., Aurelian, XXXV, 3; R. E. II, 5, col. 911.

24 Many examples can easily be found in R. I. C., v. V, pt. 1.

25 Under the early empire the sol type is the Greco-Roman god of little importance, but with the accession of the Severi the sol type has the appearance of an omnipotent deity. See chp. I, p. 14.

and many cults that had very little to do with the sun were introduced into the worship of Sol Invictus.[26] This resulted in sun worship becoming a monotheistic unification of pagan religions in the Roman world and as such it provided the last obstacle to the triumph of Christianity.

The worship of Sol Invictus established by Aurelian was a success because it did not offend Roman tradition. He established the worship along Roman lines and did not try to force oriental practices into the rites. In addition to this, Sol had become a spiritual common denominator throughout the Empire: Sol and Apollo were established gods at Rome, Mithraism was very popular in the army and the Syrian baals had established themselves in the west.[27] The result of this was that the Sun was the deity which could most easily achieve pagan syncretism and since the solar cults had more to offer spiritually than the old Roman pantheon Sol Invictus was accepted more readily by the majority of the people. As a common religion amongst people of different races is one step towards unity, the worship of Sol Invictus was acceptable politically. Sol Invictus therefore became a political-spiritual symbol accepted by many different people of divergent backgrounds.

The action of the emperor-priest Elagabalus was that of a

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26 R. E., II, 5, co. 909 and Bayet, Rel. Rom., p. 251.

27 Whether or not the Syrian cults gained any ground outside Syrian communities is a matter for speculation.

religious fanatic. The naivety of his programme to establish his Baal as the supreme god of the empire is not surprising when we remember that he was fourteen at the time of his accession and only seventeen or eighteen when he was murdered. An understanding of the mind of this boy really belongs to the field of psychology, but it seems that when he was made priest of Elagabalus at such a tender age, he devoted himself completely to bearing this responsibility, as hereditary high priest. When he became emperor he saw the opportunity of magnifying his god, and this he proceeded to do with no consideration of political issues.[28] These were handled by the women of the family.

None of the ancient historians has said a single good word for the young emperor, but all have condemned him as a filthy pervert who spent the whole of his reign indulging in lust. Before we ourselves condemn Elagabalus we should remember that his "perverted" activities and manner of dress were common to all the Syrian cults of which we have some knowledge. Lucian tells us that the Galli, the priests of the Dea Syria, dressed as women, castrated themselves and refrained from eating or sacrificing the flesh of swine;[29] Apuleius talks of the adherents of the Dea Syria as effeminate, masochistic, and outlandish

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28 Herod., V, 6, 1. says that Elagabalus seemed to devote all of his time to dancing and worshipping; at V, 7, 4. he says that Elagabalus started to teach his cousin the dancing and intended enrolling him in the priesthood. The indication is that Elagabalus thought of nothing but his god.

29 Lucian, De Dea Syria, 27, 40, 54.

in their dress habits.[30] This evidence redeems Elagabalus to a certain extent, and when we consider how these lascivious activities must have attracted to him a great number of sexually-sick people it is less surprising to us that his reign was considered as black as those of Caligula, Nero and Commodus.[31]

When the evidence is looked at in this light, the young emperor still appears as nothing more than a religious fanatic, and it seems, therefore, that the root of all the dislike for him was his radical orientalisation of Rome. The Roman traditionalists would have opposed him from the start, but the plebs, for the most part, would have been quite contented so long as he continued to bestow free gifts upon them and offer lavish entertainment. The Praetorians, almost traditionally by this time, would support the highest bidder, and it seems likely that Julia Maesa, when she noticed that her grandson's religious activities were not being received very well, obtained the support of these soldiers and threw in her lot with her other daughter Mamaea and her son Alexander.

The worship of Elagabalus was rejected at Rome as a result of the complete disregard for Roman tradition and the imposition of

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30 Apuleius, Metam., VIII, 26-28.

31 S. H. A., Hel., VI, 5, points out that many offices were given to evil men.

oriental practices by his chief priest. Even though the followers of the Roman gods were not persecuted, the Syrian people throughout the empire and the dregs of every nation were given the influence to undermine everything that was Roman. Aurelian, on the other hand, by treading more carefully, was successful in establishing the Sun as an acceptable and all-powerful deity throughout the empire.

The reign of Elagabalus had no direct influence on religious development at Rome except in that he may have been a warning light for Aurelian when he successfully established the worship of Sol Invictus. The young emperor's action is, however, quite interesting in another way. His was the first attempt at Rome, if not in the Western World as a whole, to set up a type of monotheistic worship. A divinely inspired emperor, which Elagabalus certainly was as chief priest of his Baal, was an idea new to the West and one which was valued from the time of constantine,[32] though not constantly.

We have seen that before the Principate of Elagabalus the sun was worshipped at Rome and that increasing Oriental influence brought more attention to solar monotheism. The reign of Elagabalus, however, showed that the Romans were reluctant to abandon the traditions that

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32 I refer to Constantine's idea of receiving his power from God and the ensuing idea of the 'divine right' of kings.

had made them great, and that Oriental worship was strange to them and in need of modification before it could be accepted.

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THE SOURCES FOR THE REIGN OF THE EMPEROR ELAGABALUS

The period of Roman History from 218-222 A.D. is covered in the histories of Herodian, Dio Cassius, the Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and Zosimus. The latter three limit their accounts of the reign of Elagabalus to just a few lines and consequently they are of little value in providing detailed information of the emperor's activities. Herodian, Dio Cassius and the Scriptores provide a more detailed account of his Principate, but only Herodian and Dio Cassius were contemporary to this period. Aelius Lampridius, the author of the 'Life of Heliogabalus' in the Historia Augustorum, addresses himself to Constantine,[1] and refers to a 'Life of Heliogabalus' by a Marcus Maximus,[2] who is otherwise unknown. Herodian[3] states that he had a career in the Imperial Civil Service, and since his book ends with the year 238, he must have written much of his history from personal experience and observation. Dio Cassius' account of the young emperor's reign may well be based on personal observation, as he also held Imperial office[4] and it seems

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1 S. H. A., Hel., II, 4; XXXIV, 1.

2 S. H. A., Hel., XI, 6.

3 Herod., I, 2, 5.

4 See A. H. McDonald, O. C. D., s.v. Dio Cassius, p. 282; he was praetor in 193 and consul twice.